SPEECH

OF

HON. JAMES S. ROLLINS,

OF MISSOURI,

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES, MAY 30, 1864,

ON HIS RESOLUTION

DECLARATORY OF THE OBJECTS OF THE WAR.

The House then proceeded, as the regular order of business, to the consideration of a resolution offerd on the 16th of December, 1863, by Mr. ROLLINS, of Missouri, as follows:

Resolved, That, prompted by a just patriotism, we are in favor of an earnest and successful prosecution of the war, and that we will give a warm and hearty support to all those measures which will be most effective in speedily overcoming the rebellion, and in securing a restoration of peace, and which may not substantially infringe the Constitution and tend to subvert the true theory and character of the Government; and we hereby reiterate that the present deplorable civil war has been forced upon the country by the disunionists now in revolt against the constitutional Government; that in the progress of this war Congress, banishing all feelling of mere passion or resentment, will recollect only its duty to the whole country; that this war is not waged on our part in any spirit of oppression, nor for any purpose of conquest or subjugation, nor purpose of overthrowing or interfering with the rights or established institutions of those States, but to defend and maintain the supremacy of the Constitution, and to preserve the Union with all the dignity, equality, and rights of the several States unimpaired; that as soon as these objects are accomplished the war ought to cease.

The SPEAKER stated the pending question to be on the motion of Mr. MORRILL to refer the resolution to a select committee.

Mr. ROLLINS, of Missouri. Mr. Speaker, the resolution which has just been read I had the honor to offer to the House on the 16th day of December last. It is in effect the same resolution which was adopted at the July session, 1861, of the Thirty-Seventh Congress, with only two dissenting voices—Potter of Wisconsin, and Burnett of Kentucky; the last named individual being now a member of the confederate congress at Richmond. I believed it to be right then—I voted for it—and I believe it to be right now. It is presented in no partisan spirit. At the time of its introduction it was pronounced by a member on this floor, now deceased, [Mr. Lovejoy,] a "secession document." Upon a motion to lay the resolution on the table the vote stood—59 yeas, 114 nays. After the vote, the gentleman from Illinois [Mr. WASHBURN] proposing to debate it, it went over under the rules of the House, and now for the first time since comes up for consideration to-day. While it is not my purpose to detain the House at length, I feel that it is but right, as the mover of the resolution, that I should say a few words in regard to it. Whatever may come of it I have to say, Mr. Speaker, that it presents a platform upon which I have stood from the

commencement of the rebellion; and it has occurred to me that it is a safe platform, upon which every sincerely patriotic Union man in the nation might stand, no matter to what political party he might belong. And it was offered not only as expressive of my own sentiments, but as affording a rallying point for all the friends of the Government in the terrible struggle for its maintenance. I hope the House will come to a direct vote on the resolution. Let us see who is for it and who is against it. I hope there will be no indifferent motions made in regard to it.

If ever there was a time, Mr. Speaker, when there should be a cordial unity of sentiment and of action among all those who desire to preserve the happy form of Government under which we live, it is the present moment. And, sir, if we fail in this gigantic and important struggle; if the ship of State, so richly freighted, tempest-tossed, and threatened on all sides with dangers, shall go down, it will be lost not on account of inability on our part to preserve it, but because we exhaust our strength upon questions of secondary importance, and because of the infidelity of the crew in not directing their whole energies to the safety of the vessel. Sir, for what do we contend? Is it that this or that institution, long existing in some of the States, should suddenly perish? Is it to have this or that amendment hastily, and it may be irregularly, incorporated into the Constitution? Or is it for the far higher and nobler object of preserving the Constitution itself, and which is the only bond of union which can bind indissolubly together the people of all the States?

Mr. Speaker, in my younger days it was often a matter of congratulation to myself that the American people were so blessed in their happy and matchless form of Government, and so far advanced in Christian civilization, that they would never attempt to settle political questions in any other mode than by the peaceful processes of reason and of logic. In the history of the world I had read of the desolating civil wars by which other nations had been visited to gratify the ambition of kings and of despots, but I had flattered myself that we would be exempted from these calamities, and that the fierce barbarism which in other periods of the world's history had stained with blood the annals of our race would never disturb the good order of society, endanger the structure of our own Government, or mar the beauty of our social and political organization. In this I have been sadly mistaken.

I confess, sir, I placed far too high an estimate on the good sense, the virtue, and intelligence of the American people. Foolishly involved, as we are, in one of the most causeless and disastrous struggles that the world has ever witnessed, we are but following in the footsteps of those who have preceded us, setting at nought the precepts of wisdom, trampling under foot the teachings and setting at defiance the moderation of the great and good men who, with so much care, had built this grand temple of liberty, and beneath whose shadow their posterity for ages might have lived in the enjoyment of every blessing which a great country and the noblest and freest institutions ever planted on earth could confer; we find ourselves rapidly undermining this beautiful temple, bringing poverty and death upon ourselves, and destroying the hopes of the world in the capacity of men to maintain and preserve a Government based upon the will of the people and a written Constitution. It is an old adage that "human nature is the same in every period of the world," and we seem determined that its truth shall be fully exemplified in our own history. Sir, mankind are amazed at the events which are now transpiring around us, and we are stultified at the follies and calamities which we have brought upon ourselves. We are now solving the important problem whether we shall be equal to the task of preserving a Government and a Union which our ancestors had the wisdom to create and establish. No greater problem was ever presented for salution since the first dawn of creation; and no question more important

to the well-being of our race in all the ages that are to follow was ever discussed among men. And sir, and if we can pass through this civil war with the Federal Constitution and the American Union preserved, it will be the sublimest spectacle that the world has ever witnessed, growing out of the political interests and actions of men.

In my poor view war is not the best mode of preserving a Government and a Union founded in the popular will and having for its chief corner-stone the affections of the people; and a fearful responsibility rests upon all those who, in public and in private life, have in any way opposed conciliation, and by their conduct nurtured and encouraged the deplorable civil war which alike disgraces and afflicts our country. But, sir, for the present we must pass by these questions. At another time and under other circumstances we may be permitted to inquire into these matters, while the record of history will be properly made in fixing the blame which rightfully attaches to all those to whom the country is indebted for its present misfortunes. The question now is not so much for what causes and by whose indiscretion this civil war exists, but how we can most safely and honorably get out of it, with the life of the nation and the union of the States preserved. In the settlement of these important questions the heart of every true patriot throbs with anxiety, and to these, and these *alone*, should all our energies be now directed. In the midst of these great events, more important in their consequences than any that have ever transpired in the world's history, we should rise above all considerations of party malevolence or mere personal revenge. For whatever may be the errors, however great the crimes, which the southern people have committed in *commencing this war against the Government of their fathers*, we must remember that they sprang from the same stock with ourselves, that we have the same religion, speak the same language, were educated in the same schools, have the same traditions, and must share a common destiny; and in the very war now being waged they have proved themselves in generalship, in ingenuity, in courage, in pertinacity, in endurance, and in military skill a foe in all respects "worthy of our steel." It is idle for us in these particulars to underrate the high qualities of the southern people. Upon a hundred bloody and well-fought fields they have attested their valor, and wrung from us an unwilling tribute of their stern devotion to the bad and unjustifiable cause in which they are engaged. If we may boast of a Grant, a McClellan, a Hancock, a Sedgwick, and a Sherman, we must remember they have their Lees, their Johnsons, their Beauregards, their Longstreets, and their Hills. I know, sir, that in giving expression to these liberal sentiments, founded as they are in truth, I run the risk of incurring the displeasure of those rampart patriots who are unwilling to acknowledge the possession of any virtue by our obstinate and deluded enemy. We have underrated these people. Engaged as they are in an unholy cause, and despising it as we do, we have been slow to acknowledge the high qualities by which they have thus far sustained it; and at last, sir, when their military power is overcome, as by the blessing of God, it will be, if we would then expect to have peace in the land, we shall have to treat with them upon the same terms and in the same manner that other liberal and enlightened nationalities have treated with those violators of the law who have attempted to overthrow and destroy the Government under which they live.

Mr. Speaker, since the outbreak of the rebellion, the actual commencement of the war, I have seen no other mode of ending the struggle than by fighting it out. It was and is either this or the acknowledgment of the independence of the confederate States. These have been and are now the alternatives presented to the American people. These issues cannot be changed; and regarding disunion as fraught with every possible evil to ourselves and to our posterity, as a stigma upon our national escutcheon never to be obliterated, a dis-

grace to the American name, a drawback to civilization and progress, a destruction to our nationality, in the continuance of which is centered the best hopes of mankind, I have seen no other way since the war commenced of ending the controversy and re-establishing the authority of the Government than by the dread arbitrament of arms. The southern people themselves who are actually engaged in the rebellion contempelate nothing else; they have staked their all upon it; disunion is their watchword; to it they are wedded, and they will give it up only when, exhausted in men and resources, they shall be compelled to yield to the superior power of the Government. Hence, sir, in my view that legislator best meets the obligations of true patriotism in this crisis and sustains the idea of an early and a lasting peace who stands by the Government in voting men and money to carry on the war, and in encouraging every constitutional measure calculated to weaken and at the same time to end the rebellion; not in a spirit of "passion or resentment," in the language of the resolution, "nor for any purpose of conquest or subjugation, nor purpose of overthrowing or interfering with the rights or established institutions of those States, but to defend and maintain the supremacy of the Constitution, and to preserve the Union with all the dignity, equality, and rights of the several States unimpaired."

Such is the language of the resolution; and these, in my view, are the only true objects for which the war ought to be prosecuted. And any departure hitherto or hereafter made from the spirit of this resolution will only tend to prolong the strnggle, complicate it with new and difficult questions, produce division and alienation among those who ought to be united in the one essential object of saving the Government and re-establishing its authority over the entire country. To the securing of these everything else ought to be incidental and subordinate. And, sir, I venture the assertion, that if from the beginning, when a similar resolution was adopted with such great unanimity by this House, and approved and sanctioned, I believe, by all the departments of the Government, its spirit and purpose had been strictly adhered to, and the policy of the Government in no respect changed, we would this day have not only greater harmony among ourselves, but we would be much nearer the end of the rebellion. In other words, sir, if from the beginning we had pursued the policy which all Union men started out upon, if we had held aloft the Constitution and the olive branch in one hand and the sword in the other, assuring in every way the people of all the States of the South that our sole purpose and duty was to defend the Constitution of the United States, to maintain the authority of the Government and uphold the Union of the States, it is my firm conviction that to-day, sir, there would have been a Union party in the South equal in numbers to the party who are now endeavoring to destroy the Government. For we know at the commencement there was a powerful Union party in every southern State with, perhaps, the exception of South Carolina. And if we find matters so greatly changed we have mainly to look for the cause in the changed policy into which we have drifted and which has been pursued. Commencing the war without excuse or justification, we have been continually making a cause for them until they now present an almost unbroken phalanx against the Government and the progress of the national arms.

I know, sir, that the President has been surrounded by great difficulties growing out of the rebellion, far greater than any which ever beset any other President, and having confidence in his patriotism and his sincere desire to overcome the rebellion at the earliest possible day, and to re-establish the authority of the Government, I have not felt it to be my duty to make war upon him in regard to those questions wherein I differed from him. In a great crisis like this, while there must be wide differences of opinion there should at the same time be permitted the freest toleration of sentiment among all those

who claim to have the same patriotic object in view. Nor would I hold men to the strictest account for those changes of opinion which revolution and the constantly varying aspect of public questions tend to create in their minds. I can well see that men may be equally honest and patriotic, and yet differ widely in reference to the best policy for the Government to pursue, where dangers threaten on all sides. But many questions have been started and issues presented having no necessary connection with the war, and which have been greatly calculated to distract and divide and draw the attention of the people from that which should be the only true issue before the country. And to the extent that these ill-timed and irrelevant questions are continued to be urged upon us will the cause of the Government and of the Union be weakened and endangered. For at last, at the end of the struggle, we shall have to come back if we would save the Union, and to which all of us profess so much attachment, to the very terms and spirit of the resolution now under discussion In the language of Mr. Lincoln in his inaugural address, "Suppose you go to war, you cannot fight always; and when after much loss on both sides and no gain on either you cease fighting, the identical old questions as to terms of intercourse are again upon you." And I repeat, to be settled if at all in the spirit of that resolution.

I know of no punishment too severe to be inflicted upon the authors of this cruel and unnecessary rebellion; but so far as the masses are concerned, who have been deluded and led astray, we should not only adopt a policy of the broadest amnesty, but we should abandon all schemes of confiscation and legalized plunder, some of which have been persistently and too successfully urged upon this House. I take the same view of all those insane theories, having for their object the subversion of the State governments, and converting them into territorial dependencies. In looking to reunion, I have no other idea than that the States will be preserved in the same geographical and political relations to the General Government which existed anterior to the rebellion. That there will be changes in some respects I do not doubt. As well might we expect to see the hurricane and the storm sweep across the land without uprooting the forests as to see a country like ours pass through the bloody ordeal of a great revolution without some important modifications in the organic law. But it is to be hoped that these changes will not materially infringe the true theory and character of our Government or upturn the essential features of the Federal Constitution.

These unavoidable and incidental changes produced by a great rebellion we must submit to. But we can never have, in my view, a better form of government than the one under which we have lived—the most perfect, consistent with the idea of the fullest enjoyment of human liberty, which was ever formed. The division of the power of the General and State Governments, so admirably adapted to the protection and the promotion of the interests of the nation and of the individual States; the perfect harmony and beautiful simplicity of the whole machinery working in such admirable order, commanded alike the admiration and wonder of men. Endangered at last by an attempt to put into practical operation the extreme and dangerous and, I would add, absurd theory of the constitutional right of a State to secede from the Union, we must be careful, in avoiding this danger in our political system, not to drift to the other extreme, whereby the rights of the States would be ignored and swallowed up in consolidation and centralization. Our safety consists in guarding with jealous care the rights and the powers of the individval States as well as of the General Government, as defined in the Federal Constitution; a Constitution which in the achievements of human wisdom stands without a parallel, and of which a distinguished Virginian, at one time an eloquent member of this House, now a general in the confederate service, said :

"Washington, Franklin, Jefferson, all combined, in Congress or out of Congress, in Convention or out of Convention, never made that Constitution; God Almighty sent it down to your fathers. It was a work, too, of glory, and a work of inspiration.

"I believe that as fully as I believe in my Bible. No man, from Hamilton and Jay and Madison—from Edmund Randolph, who had the chief hand in making it, and he was a Virginian—the writers of it, the authors of it, and you who have lived under it from 1789 to this year of our Lord 1858, and none of your fathers, and none of your fathers' sons, have ever measured the height, or the depth, or the length, or the breadth of the wisdom of that Constitution."—*Speech of Henry A. Wise*, 1858.

I act upon the theory that the Union is to be preserved and the Government saved from wreck; for it may be, if we fail in the grand effort which we are now making for national preservation, the whole character of our institutions may be changed, and the Government itself converted into an absolute military despotism. For one, sir, I would be content to-day with the old order of things, with "the Constitution as it is and the Union as it was." They met the objects for which they were created. No people on earth ever prospered as have the American people under the influence of our free and beneficent institutions. They were established by the wisest and noblest set of men who ever adorned the annals of human history. I was satisfied with their work. It was good enough for me and for my children. I would not have changed it myself, nor do I know the men who are wise enough to improve it. And all this is perfectly consistent with that advancement and rational progress in the science of government and human improvement which a more liberalized culture among the masses and a steadily advancing Christian civilization would be sure to bring.

Mr. Speaker, as we seem to approach the termination of this struggle, questions of the greatest magnitude constantly spring up, demanding of us the most earnest consideration in their proper settlement. Even after the rebellion is overthrown, their capital taken, and their achives (if they have any) scattered to the four winds, and their military power so far overcome as to be no longer effective and dangerous, the question will still be asked, how can the masses of the people be best brought back to their former relations to the Government? I know the theory is encouraged by some gentleman—I hope they are not very numerous—that these people are to be deprived of all their political rights, that they are no longer to be readmitted to the full privileges of citizenship under the Government. Whatever justice there may be in all such suggestions as applicable to the leaders in this rebellion, I cannot appreciate the wisdom or practicability of such a policy being extended to *all* the masses of the people. It would certainly be destructive of "all the ends we aim at," in endeavoring to bring about a restoration of the Government. We all profess a desire to see the southern people, who have been led astray, return to their allegiance and meet the common obligations which we all owe to the parent Government. But how can we expect them to do this with all the onerous conditions which are so strongly urged by some imposed upon them? No, sir, even after the war is over there must be negotiation and reconciliation. All these people cannot be driven in exile from the country; you cannot punish them all for the crime of treason; they must come back, and while they will be taught and if need be forced to obey the laws, they must be made to feel that under the Government all their rights will be respected and protected, and by a faithful observance of all the laws they will be placed upon the same footing of equality with every other citizen of the Republic. To insure their fidelity, they may and perhaps they ought to be required to take such oaths and to conform to such other reasonable conditions as will be sanctioned by the good judgment and accord with the enlightened liberality of the country. By this policy we may reasonably hope to have peace after the war is over; the disorders of society produced by the rebellion will be assuaged; prejudices enkindled by the

fierce conflict of arms will be softened; and we must leave to time to heal other wounds and to wear away the sectional animosities so long agitating the country, culminating, at last, in a disgraceful and bloody war, and shaking the very foundations upon which the superstructure of our Government rests.

Mr. Speaker, in my poor view this is the only mode by which we can ever expect to restore perfect peace to the country and bring again once more to all the people that prosperity and good order which existed prior to the breaking out of this rebellion. Residing in a State where at one time the opposition to the Federal Government on the part of many of the citizens was violent and unrelenting, which has furnished a large number of soldiers to the confederate army, and in which the authority of the General Government has been almost entirely re-established, and the citizens have returned to their allegiance, I am not wholly without experience in reference to the influence and good effect of the policy to which I have adverted. I know that these opinions will find but little sympathy with many gentlemen on this floor. Extremely radical as they are and indignant at the attempt to destroy the Government, irritated at the calamities which the war has brought upon the country, and the heavy burdens which must rest for many years to come upon the shoulders of the people, and following the instincts of human nature, they think more of inflicting punishment upon the guilty than by a liberal and humane policy endeavouring to win them back to their allegiance. They would confiscate their estates; they would parecel out their lands among the brave soldiers who have borne aloft the banner of their country in the suppression of the rebellion; they would deprive them of the right to vote, as well as of the right to hold office under the Government; they would establish a system of serfdom over the entire southern States; they would create a necessity for a standing army in every county and district of that part of our country in order to keep the peace and prevent revolt! And some would even go so far as to elevate the negro to the privileges of citizenship, and the ownership of the property of the country, while they would see our own race, men of Anglo-Saxon blood, degraded in the scale of being, and become mere "hewers of wood and drawers of water" for that servile and inferior race of men whom they had hitherto held as slaves! Sir, I cannot repress the indignation which I feel and which the bare intimation of a policy like this awakens in my bosom, and I can regard the men who would attempt the execution of such a policy as none other than madmen.

> "Oh, judgment! art thou fled to brutish beasts,
> And have men lost their reason?"

Mr. Speaker, I think I appreciate at its full value the importance of the preservation of the American Union and of the Government of the United States. The idea of a continuance of our national unity and the grand results in the long vista of coming years which would flow from it in diffusing the blessings of liberty and of free government to mankind in every part of the habitable globe, has been the thought, more than any other, which has guided and influenced my political action in life. It has been the political divinity at whose altar I have worshiped from my infancy; and when I contempelate the horrors which must inevitably result from the breaking up of this national unity, the degradation and dishonor which must forever attach to the very name of American, I feel that we ought to be ready to make any and every sacrifice in order to preserve it. But, sir, there are some things, in my view, which are even worse than disunion; and rather than see that bright and beautiful land destroyed, its people deprived of citizenship, the southern States brought into complete subjection and controlled and governed by the other States; rather than see the negro, under the influence of a false philanthropy and a pertinacious fanaticism, taking the place of the white man, and made by law politically

and socially his equal, or, as some would prefer, his master; sir, rather than to witness these things, horrible as the idea of disunion has ever been to me, I would say let there be seperation, hoping still, however, that in the future, when the animosities of the present hour no longer controlled, another generation of men, following the patriotic example of the fathers of the Republic, would bring about union once more, so much demanded by the interests of this continent and the happiness and liberty of our race. No, sir, I am for preserving the Government, but with all the "dignity, equality, and rights of the several States unimpaired," and, I will add further, with the rights of the people, of every citizen of the Republic, in whatever part of it he may reside, equal under the law and under the Constitution, responsible only in a legal and constitutional manner for any violations of the law or for any crimes and offenses which he may commit against the Government. These are the general views which have occurred to me as most proper to be adopted in any plan of reunion which may come up for consideration after the cessation of hostilities, and they are substantially embodied in the resolution which we now have under consideration. But, sir, all these theories will fail, all resolutions passed by this House or by the Congress of the United States will be of no avail unless our arms meet with success. The overthrow of the military power of the South is a *sine qua non* to the re-establishment of peace and the restoration of the Union; and every measure which tends to strengthen our Army, to encourage our soldiers in the field, to sustain our generals, should receive the cordial support and hearty approbation of every patriot in the land.

Mr. Speaker, I have never despaired of the Republic. I know the terrible trial which is now upon us, and the still more terrible ordeal through which we may yet have to pass before we reach the end of the struggle. But, sir, I believe that the American people will be equal to all emergencies that may spring out of this contest. They are alive to its importance. They know the issues at stake. Hitherto they have responded with alacrity and promptness to every call which the Government has made upon them; they have not spared their means; and they have proved themselves ever ready to bare their bosoms to the storm. And now, at the very crisis of the nation's fate, in the midst of the remorseless and desperate struggle which has at last come upon us; when the capital of the confederate States is threatened, and, as we hope, on the eve of being taken, and the president and high offcers driven from the sacred soil of Virginia, and their government litterally broken up; when the brave and immortal Grant, worthy, as he has proved himself to be, of the highest honors of the nation, is bearing aloft the national ensign, and carrying the eagles of the Republic to the very heart of rebeldom, we have abundant cause of thankfullness to Almighty God for the bright bow of promise which spans our skies. And in this hour of the deepest anxiety, when the fate of the nation and the perpetuity of our Government is trembling in the balance, and when the complete success of our arms will send a thrill of gladness and of joy, of hope and of confidence to the heart of every friend of free Government throughout the habitable globe, may God inspire every true friend of the Constitution and of the Union with courage, with patience, with hope, with magnanimity, that we may meet the duties of the hour like "men, high-minded men," not only at the present time, but also when we shall have passed the great impending crisis which is now upon us.

With these remarks, Mr. Speaker, if no other gentleman desires to discuss the resolution, I move the previous question; but I first desire to modify it by striking out the word "substantial."

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